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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1239  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1414  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/18/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [ER](#)  
SUBJECT: ISAIAS: WE COULD WAIT NO LONGER; ERITREA,S TROOPS  
LIKELY TO REMAIN IN TSZ

REF: ASMARA 861

Classified By: AMB. Scott H. DeLisi for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1) (U) As of 15:00 (8:00 EDT) on October 18, the situation on the ground in the Western Sector of the TSZ has not changed. 1000 troops and estimated 10 tanks remain near Om Hajer and an estimated 500 troops and 4 tanks remain outside of Shambiko. Earlier reports of up to 50 tanks and 5000 troops have not been corroborated by UN or other sources. At most it appears that two more tanks may have entered the TSZ. At the same time, at least some of the restrictions on movement of UNMEE in the western sector appear to have eased.

2) (C) The clearest statement so far of the intentions that led the GSE to move into the TSZ came from President Isaias in an October 17 meeting with UN Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs for the Horn of Africa, Kjell Magne Bondevik. Isaias forcefully informed Bondevik that Eritrea has waited four and a half years for action by the international community in implementing the Algiers Accord and that they are tired of waiting. Isaias declared that Eritrea is disappointed with the UN and international partners for not enforcing the binding decision of the EEBC and would, in essence, reassert its sovereignty over the TSZ (which is, and has always been recognized as, Eritrean territory.)

13. (C) The Netherlands Ambassador, Nelleke Linssen(protect), told Ambassador the evening of October 17 that she had heard much the same argument from Yemane Ghebremeskel of the Office of the President. Yemane, asserting Eritrean sovereignty over the TSZ, emphasized that it needed to be fully developed and that it represents some of the nation,s most rich and fertile land. He stated specifically that the Eritrean goal was to bring about the end of the TSZ. Ghebremeskel told the Ambassador much the same in a separate conversation much the same but stopped short of affirming that the GSE wanted to collapse the TSZ ) despite being asked specifically several times. Ghebremeskel equally was unwilling to offer his views on whether Eritrea was, in essence, telling UNMEE to leave Eritrea ) though he appeared unfazed when Ambassador and others suggested that this might be one of the possible outcomes if the GSE was no longer prepared to recognize or respect the TSZ.

¶4. (C) The comments by Isaias and Ghebremeskel expand upon statements made in the press by other GSE officials (reftel) and conversations with Col. Zacharias Ogbagaber, the GSE Commissioner to UNMEE. Col. Zacharias told Poloff that the soldiers were there to help with the harvest and that armies always move with their equipment. He further explained that they needed the tanks for protection because there were tanks on the other side of the border. At a meeting with UNMEE SRSG Azouz Ennifar, Col. Zacharias reiterated this statement claiming the military was charged with the management of all development projects and that the land needs to be developed.

UNMEE staff also told Poloff that President Isaias reportedly had forwarded a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, however, the text of the letter was unknown.

¶5. (C) Comment: We anticipate a growing assertion of GSE control over the TSZ, especially in the fertile west and central sectors. The implications of the GSE,s action remain uncertain, however, especially in regard to the Cessation of Hostilities agreement, the Algiers Accord and even the EEBC decision. Although the military implications of this action appear, for now, benign the political and diplomatic fallout in terms of the further efforts to resolve the border standoff could be considerable. End comment.  
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